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The Student

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.
FALL 1991

The Student

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THE GRAND ILLUSION: *Appearance and Reality at Wake Forest*

By Stephen G. Dillingham

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree...*

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge

A few short years ago, Wake Forest embarked on a building project of its own. This project, and several other "improvements," have helped create an impressive picture of the university. However, as Coleridge's dream-vision of Xanadu was shattered by the arrival of an unwanted visitor, this image too will fade under scrutiny.

Most of the programs and projects touted by the administration place an emphasis on appearance rather than reality. Whether intentional or not, it seems that Wake Forest is trying to achieve national prominence as a liberal arts institution by improving nearly everything except the quality of education. Here are just a few choice examples:

■ While the Benson Center may have been needed to provide space for student organizations, its fitness center and large space-wasting rotunda reek of excess. Of course, the rotunda does look quite stately. So stately, in fact, that someone decided that the professional center needed one too. And with the fitness center, students will be able to look good also.

■ The library expansion and modernization, while desperately needed, have become part of a plan to create a more "service-oriented" library. Service is nice, but I always thought (naively, perhaps) that books were the defining feature of a good library.

■ Cable television is now available in every dorm room—need I say more about this?

■ Constant improvement and expansion of the Office of Career Planning and Placement indicates that Wake Forest has adopted the popular view that the value of an education lies in the money you can make later. Students are told which majors and courses will allow them to get the best jobs, but those who wish to go on to graduate school receive little advice or support except that which they can glean from the faculty.

None of these "improvements," which together represent

millions of dollars in expenditures, have helped improve academic life at Wake Forest in the least. To be fair, though, not all examples of such misplaced priorities at this university are recent developments—some have been around for years.

For example, whether or not the Greek system perpetuates sexism, elitism, alcoholism, or any other -ism mentioned on the *Old Gold and Black* editorial pages, it does absolutely nothing to enhance the academic atmosphere of Wake Forest. Maintaining test files and keeping track of which professors are the easiest do not fit my idea of academic contributions. And how many students miss class in order to attend Greek functions?

Wake Forest's long athletic tradition is another example. Although Wake Forest maintains higher academic standards for its athletes than most schools, one cannot deny that standards *are* lower for athletes. Such double standards illustrate the widely held but seldom explicitly stated belief

**Hungry? Go to Pizza Hut
or Taco Bell. Bored? Pick
up the remote control and
see what's on cable...
Need a job after graduation?
Visit Career Planning
and Placement.**

that sacrificing a little integrity is acceptable if a school can field a competitive team.

What are the net results of these actions and attitudes? Wake Forest is perpetuating an atmosphere in which students are never made to think of much more than their immediate comfort.

Hungry? Go to Pizza Hut or Taco Bell. Bored? Pick up the remote control and see what's on cable. Have a paper to do? Go to the new service-oriented library and let someone help you find the books you need. Test? Check out the fraternity test files. Need a job after graduation? Visit Career Planning and Placement.

There is very little motivation for stu-

dents actually to *learn anything*. The SAT scores of the freshman class rise each year, but human nature has a much more lasting effect than test-prep courses. Very few students will learn for the sake of learning when they can be entertained for four years instead.

And naturally, the university provides a remedy for the "truly interested" student — an academic theme house. If Huffman is supposed to be where people who are interested in academic should live, what does that say about the rest of campus?

Dear old Wake Forest, thine is a noble name...

But, as someone once asked, what's in a name?

ACADEMICS AT WAKE FOREST:

Problems and Solutions

By Christine Sorrell

In its attempt to become a national university, Wake Forest has been classified as a "comprehensive college" and a "regional university", categories which include a disparate assortment of schools. We have too many students graduating with pre-professional degrees to be considered a liberal arts college, but our graduate programs are not large enough to qualify us as a national university. Because we are situated between these two categories, we have few good schools with which we can compare ourselves, a situation which hides a multitude of sins. If we were forced to compare ourselves with the Ivy League or with small schools such as St. John's College and Amherst, we would become aware of the frightening lack of consistency and quality in our academics.

Supposedly, the student body is improving (a fact which is said to be evidenced by rising SAT scores). However, this is not enough to ensure a rise or even a maintenance of the status quo in academics, because there are and always will be students in any university who will not want to work or to learn more than necessary. Rising SAT scores will not solve that problem for us. I have been in too many classes where the professor's lecture was interrupted by someone asking "will this be on the test?" In smaller classes, students have decided (on some unconscious level, one hopes) to band together and not do half of the work the teacher expected of them.

These situations leave some professors with little recourse, since they feel it would be unreasonable for them to fail or even give D's to three-fourths of the class. They assume their own expectations are too high; they give in and lighten the work load. To avoid this problem, the university must adopt more stringent grading guidelines which will minimize the deleterious effect

these students have on classes and encourage those same students to do better themselves. It is time we realize that not all students are capable of self-legislation on such matters and that perhaps the university should do some legislating on their behalf.

The university must encourage professors to remember that average work and average performance deserves a C, regardless of the supposed intellectual level of the student. After all, that is what a C is supposed to signify: average. If all professors were asked to observe a stricter grading policy, the stigma would be wiped away from those terrible beings currently known as "hard," "horrible," and "unfair" professors.

All professors could give more comprehensive and varied exams: they would no longer feel the misguided need to worry about lazy students, students who want to minimize their studying by knowing exactly what is to be on the test. Also, the lazier students would realize that what they are doing is just not enough. It would not surprise me in the least if many professors were relieved at the prospect of putting down grade inflation. How can they with a clear conscience give B's and even A's year after year to students who clearly have not earned them?

As it stands now, a professor who gives lower than normal grades is likely to be avoided by most students. The policy I have suggested would also lessen this problem: The students who did not wish to work would be forced to do so because they could not take "easy" professors.

Likewise, highly gifted and motivated students who fear a B (because of How It Might Look to fellowship committees) would not have the option of taking easy-grading professors; they would have to *work* in real classes in order to earn those precious A's. In this way, both types of

students would benefit from some of the better professors on campus whom they are now carefully avoiding. Thus, with some guidance from the powers that be, everyone could be made better off.

Increasing the normal credit load from eighteen to twenty credits per semester would also greatly improve academics at Wake Forest. That would only amount to five courses at most, a load which any student at Wake Forest could handle if he or she was willing to spend more time on classes and less on partying all weekend. As it stands now, students' course loads are normally padded anyway with one- and two-credit courses which, although they are sometimes worthwhile, do not demand much work outside of class.

With a credit load of twenty credits, classes such as HSS electives or Choral Union could still be added without it being at the expense of more demanding and more important classes. The heavier load would provide a more academically-oriented environment, forcing students to look at classes as the central and most valuable part of their four years in college; they would get much more for their parents' money.

These changes would improve the quality and consistency of classes and also the value-systems of individual students. There are, however, other academic problems at Wake Forest. A third change that needs to be made involves the institution of uniform standards on departmental honors. All criteria look similar in the bulletin: usually a 3.0 overall and a 3.3 in the major, along with being "highly qualified" and completing some sort of large project. Despite appearances, however, the standards of the departments are not the same.

For example, the physics department graduates about one honors student every four or five years out of about ten graduates per year. In contrast, psychology in 1990 gave honors to eight students out of a class of only seventy-six, and they gave the distinction to 11 majors last year. Check

the math: The first comes to 1.8 per cent and the second is over ten per cent. Obviously, there is a discrepancy between the departments as to just how good a student should be to receive honors.

The statistics I have quoted represent the extremes. Both departments, however, have what they see as careful, fair and thorough procedures for selecting and eventually approving their honors candidates. What is lacking is a thorough inter-departmental standard. Of course, it would be ludicrous simply to require certain percentages from each department. In the smaller departments such as philosophy, the sample of students is much too small for such a strict cut-off.

We need, therefore, a committee with representatives from each department: Such a committee could help design equal and appropriate guidelines for each department's honors program. These guidelines should include a higher GPA requirement, both over all and in the major. A 3.3/ 3.5 requirement does not seem to be an unreasonable demand for a "highly qualified" student, even if strict grading policies were instituted. Clearly, most of the other guidelines would have to be tailored to the individual departments, but the committee could ensure that the amount and quality of work required be consistent.

By means of these changes, Wake Forest could raise the quality of its academics to the level which its faculty and students are capable of achieving. Also, with such changes, the school would be able to attract a better, more highly motivated type of student.

We are already fortunate enough to have relatively small classes and highly qualified faculty: Many of them have turned down jobs at better-known schools so that they could remain in this closely-knit undergraduate community. Our faculty are talented, caring and enthusiastic. Our students are intelligent and capable of much learning, but need more guidance. It is past time for Wake Forest to rise to its potential, but perhaps it is not yet too late.

Poetry

J. M. W. TURNER IN VENICE, 1819-1845

San Giorgio Maggiore (1840)

This light is all the morning is — a yellow
whose washings warm the water.
Dreams and Venice are half-dissolved
in early morning mist, their colors
rinsed in yellow light. He longs
to paint it all. So much is lost

it hurts, the way the daily loss
of all the veiling yellow
hurts. When evening comes, the long,
slow pulse of darkness on the water
splashes the shore with violent colors.
By morning, even they dissolve

again... *San Giorgio*. The syllables dissolve
the way the city does, the instant lost
but oh, the lingerings. Mid-morning finds the colors
pouring from the sea, blue-greens and yellows
trembling on the surfaces of water.

San Giorgio. The early sunlight traces along

its silent edges, and Turner paints. He longs
sometimes to swim where everything's dissolved,
to move beneath that streaming water
feeling warm and liquid and lost
among the greens and blues and yellows.
That would be real — being washed in those colors,

being deep in those pools of light and color
and water. Then all the longings
would end. Then all the vanished yellows,
the things that dissolved and didn't dissolve
wouldn't matter. You would already be lost
in the swimming in colors and light-filled water.

But he can't get that lost. That elusive water
is the wash of his brush, and those colors
are paints. He stands at the window, feeling the loss
Of morning turned afternoon, and longs
to paint it all, to capture it dissolving.
Here, a sweep of pale blue. A bathe of yellow.

Yellow light. Silver mist. Blue-green water.
The canvas dissolves into color.
Before long he will be almost lost.

embers
at best...

the generous young
firefly
at some quasipolychotomous causal
"request"
met me at my
windshield.

how
flickers and fades
the Real which
we
miss
dismiss
from the lockbox
found early and
securely

tucked
away

the cancer patients'
eyes,
the astronauts' demise, with microcosm
cries
as you glide toward the
bigtruck

the
percentage if given
being dangerously low
the
friction
smoothed
removed
this the lifeshattering —
shrapnel buried deathdeep
burning

within the fat wrapped around your soul

BRAINSTORM

my mind busies
and shunts
stumbles
the inaudible
mumble of my

is and all
that is
within
my was
(and is) is

all (to me)
being and
becoming
are (or
were) will be —

All
you touch and see.

behind the matrixmumble
lies perhaps
between
the causal
intervenes the moto

primo? six senses
the questioning
they
bring to
lean on this

side loan belief
its most
fragile
tension and
fundamental supreme in

All
untouched — unseen

the mannikin man
resurfaced
again

over the holidays

came down from
the attic
and

broke my agreement.

it was pissed to
overhear
the

foreign foolishness betray

one he actually
loved
(two

if the manikin counted).

that one i call Portrait D'une Femme.

and numerous others.
horror when
they

stand so near

one can imagine
what was
revealed

to poor mannequin

betrayed and cloaked,
these reactionaries
find

it equally unreal.

one sings this
the injustice
created

in a half-life.

i, as in all my recently
somewhatsself-aware
ness, seemed watching
from a very safe distance
another

one of my militant dandies,
well-rounded and carefully
eclectic, pieced with all
aesthetic principles of cut
and paste

liberal artsy-fartsy pretense
and trivial ego-indulging
radically new-world salvation
promise half-wit inconsistent
ideas.

others should be reported:
one reading *Tremor*
seven times through another,
there, using eyes (with a
perfect glaze) and silence to get
laid.

INDIAN SUMMER

An exhausted breeze
Heaves
Sweating out a tendril
To steady itself
Over a steam-rising road.
Its breath reeks mildew.
Blurry cattle swim
In their pools of green
As moldy farmland sags
Under the potbelly
Of the end of summer.
And Autumn is annoyed,
Like a middle-aged housewife
whose guests just won't leave.

PATRIARCHY

Would we had aspired so high,
so much, so far, to truth...
Words accost our inward breaths
and strangle exhalations
Depriving us of all
but vicious visions:
These, my instruments, my children,
abandon loyalties,
consuming me before this flesh is withered.

Had I bred them differently,
would they be much kinder?
A father's life is ever brittle —
devotion and a sense of purpose vie, fronting
all but sterile, mechanistic touch
and hollow-eyed emotion.
Drained, without respite, this ascension plummets —
the flight of a greenish moth
bereft of powdered wings.

CIVILISATION

Youth is not civilised!
Sense of permanence — great guffaw!
More is lacking
 eine kleine nachtmusik
 history's undulation
 adulterate prohibitions

But Age is timeless, masque we don
la jeunesse doree

God created Man
Then, from Man, Woman
Child created twice-removed,
the smallest tie Divinity
Am I God's?

Brothers all
Brethren in our brotherhood
that we were but begotten
Never from dust, though to ashes we return
Some lesser magic,
only wriggling, spewing liquid
volcanic diffusion
into vacant loins
Woher kommt der Hauch
Breath of life.

Our inheritance — their wind,
their earth should we prove meek.
Bastardized, barbaric birthright.
Princely pagan!, am I
ejaculated propagate squirming freely,
but in concave of One's hand?

God is a fleamarket artist
Who cleans his brush in the Tugaloo River.
A velvet mural
Washed with a pine dipped in raspberries.
Absorbed by the cloth,
The color becomes sumac.
He goes to the mountains for his skyline —
Trees carved out of coal,
Statues tied to the earth.
A cobwebbed net brings silver fish to the surface,
The skins are great for stars.
A constellation reads,
Elvis lives.

THE ROAD

There is a man who taught me to drive,
And he told me to always keep my eye
On what lies far ahead.
Yet now I wonder.

In my memories
A path trickles down a mountain,
Greeting a placid stream occasionally.
I have felt with my toes
The lichen of the rocks under the green;
The thirsty deer
And skittish frogs
And the nests and their owners
Are familiar, and I greet them
As old friends,
Returning sages
Of a time long past,
Reminders of a time yet to come.

The sun that leaps from that
Mountain stream
Sings canticles,
As I wind too fast
Through the forest,
And that sun shields
Sight from sin;
That the driven eyes
Turn upward
Like in the elevator,
Fearing pursuit...

I am dreaming I know,
I awaken and try to rub away
Saul's disease.
I strain to see
With wide eyes,
But all I see is road.

CATS

They're planning to take over.
Every day lying under my car,
under the vast expanse of the chassis.
They learn how our machinery works.
The fuel, the hoses,
studying the consistency of oil,
thickness of rubber.
They purr their furry engines,
humming, plotting.

They stalk me at night in my bed.
Sometimes I wake; their glassy green eyes
fixed, tails twitching.
In the morning, I'll find
fine hairs in my soup,
and hairs woven deep back in the drawers,
coating the silverware;
a delicate web shimmering on the couch.

WONTON SOUP AND FRIED RICE

In a basement on First
three pot-bellied Chinese women
hunch like beggars,
squint into dough.
Above the table several
40-watt bulbs blossom.

Occasionally they switch,
one writes while the other two
tuck and fold.
The whole time, they grin
like starched flour,
the gleam of each tooth
an ancient glimmering jewel.

And they haven't budged for years.
With the constant flutter
against the window,
these shrivelled women
work softly
to the beat
of sparrow's wings.

BONE DRY CRAVING

Fish circle my legs,
fins brushing my hips —
trigger, porgy.
They tear the muscle in strips,
thin cigarettes trailing from their mouths.
Pinfish, yellowtail, grouper —
they devour me, like gourmets
suckling the bones.
I watch my eyes pecked by grunt,
my tongue snatched out by greedy 'cuda.
I smile when I remember the little girl,
her outstretched hand, her musing stare
as I floated past the dock.
Sheepshead, margate, perch
boil around me.

I want to be sea again,
the spray over the bow of some great trawler,
the rain floating on the dunes.
I want to be water stretched between two brittle deserts.

SHE FELL, TOO SOON

Of the hued-manifold leaves' manna field I walked
Through, there swung a cursing moan to me amongst,
From one that pointed, rose up red and refusing, balked
To curl consummate, to lie free from angst.
Its countenance was pure — not gradual rust,
Not green to gold, orange to brown to ground.
It alone cried of its mistreatment, mistrust;
Asked as elegy: At least stomp me down.

Bending and allowing its coarse serrated rage,
I held it soft and whispering over, told:
If only my birth'd been known in your lone age
Or from this wood my cradle's lumber rolled,
 You might've waited, searched for me,
 Clung, 'til I picked you, to the tree.

In an undulating sea of ripe corn
bloated crows stagger from ear to ear
leaving only husks.
Upon a wooden cross a ragged
scarecrow is nailed.
Powerless and silent he hangs defeated.
In the barn on the hill the farmer
slumbers
while the seed he has sown is devoured.

Flickering at four o'clock
In darkness
Coke burps smell with talks
About scrotum detached
From boys or men
Wrenched emotions
Wax on the bedspread
Mattresses on the tile
Camping out in Yady's room
To wonder about time
Held still in photographs
Loves sleeping in memory
Pubic hair and funny girl secrets
Beautiful intimacy
Songs and memories synthesized
And shared
1,000 jinxes
Coming out of childhood
Way out
Into sex and erogenous Zones
Ha! Well...
And things that can be vulgar
And Beautiful.

Scarlet toes
under cotton sheets
seem elegant as toes can be
 bloody piglets
on their way
to market.
stubblets stuck on a body
too big for their structure
 To market
 To market
for slaughter at market...
the piglets for porkchops
at Big Man's table
The ends of gushing blue veins
seep red at the tips
but don't just run or drip
just chip
 and blow away with a gust
into the hallway.

CHERRY STREET

Salem coughs
and stutters
like a kid
having his first cigarette

on a fishing trip,
Nylon line carefully tangled,
Hook rusting in the mud
with a bucket
of nightcrawlers.

Streetlights like glowbugs
used as bait
dangle from the lines

and businessmen
in blue suits
stand in a triangle on the sidewalk,
Arms open to the sky.

ABANDONED FARM ON WINDROW ROAD

Folding at once,
The roads bend
from the spot.

This evening
no one mows
beside the fence,
And the mottle of cattle
mixes with shadows
from the cedars.

Hay rolled in rows
around abandoned gasoline truck,
Red and white caution sign
rusting in the field
like an altar.

JAI*

in their flowing iridescent skirts
the color of the newest spring
trailing behind them most carelessly
the day fairies dictate the dance
of the bees

wandering among the shells in robes
the color of the ocean deep
the night fairies orchestrate the harmony
of the seas

draped in glowing feathers soft but sharp
the color of the history
the star fairies' truth burns holes in the dark veil
of the Only

they flit among the young in dresses
the color of their smiles carefree:
the children's fairies dance and sing the gay songs
of the wee

softly over the sheets in garments
the color of the Absolute
appearing as invisibility
my fairies whisper, 'you are part
of the key'

* *Jai* is an Indian word meaning victory.

WALKIN' ALONG THINKIN'

Walkin' along thinkin'
"Oh, my luv's like iced tea
at Pizza Hut" when this guy
with scraggly hair and a
beard wearing a tank top
and a baseball cap in a white
Isuzu pick-up truck with Jesus
Saves on the back almost runs
over me and the air is warm
and perfumed sweet like summer
(though it's only mid-spring)
with the caterpillars already
coming on when I thought...
YA KNOW, I COULD WORRY A LOT LESS.

ADULTERER'S PROVERB

Till lust conceives, naught is possible:

Indiscretions breed interest and spasms
Strip the soul of all pretension;
Articulate tongues engender orgasms,
Inundating comprehension.

Fiction

ANITRA'S DANCE

Having misplaced her best gloves, the soprano remarked to herself as she entered the church's side door, not in discomfort, that the coldest part of a city street at night must be the doorknob of a warm place. Her boys scurried inside in front of her, blowing into their gloved hands, rattling their teeth, wanting to ask her again (the last was the too-manyth time) if they'd be home in time to play in the new snow before bed. Anitra, who was hands-down the most poised, cough-stifling, back-tingling voice the choir had had in recent memory (the boys had heard so from so many old short women; heard that the women would never get up and come to church if their beautiful mother stopped singing), and who loved singing and solos and working with Reginald Lunt, also wanted to be home tonight; Dave would already be making dinner for himself and Andy, the oldest, and with the drive and sitting through Philip and Seth's swimming lesson and now *this*. Tonight the old brick and wrought iron of historic Lancaster bespoke not quaintness or colonial fashion, only cold and commitment.

A cold city street, no matter how picturesque, cannot be the best place for a pianist; it numbs the fingers. This, his most frequent thought when walking, created an expression for others on the street if eyes met and helped him whenever he crossed the four blocks from a certain old brownstone to the stained-glass, heavy wood entrance of this, the only church he's really known in decades, the only church to have such a dedicated organist as this one, who'd come after dark to rehearse three nights a week. And always after dark, after the voices finished work or this league or that committee. While dark, with no natural light on the keys, the singers, the ledgers and trebles and *crescendos*, can't be the best time of day to rehearse. But tonight, despite, nothing could keep him home.

Inside, standing in the formal foyer, he saw her at the end of a hall leading down to the Sunday school rooms, helping the boys off with their coats and hats and setting them up in the children's library. He wondered if she knew, if she too could hear the pool balls cracking in the basement and ricocheting and reverberating throughout the building and interfering with her sound every time she brought the boys; they were too small to be here. But the mother's grace had no equal. The boys seemed to love her dearly, and she them, and how he saw her down the hall, past portraits of past pastors, past now darkened stained windows, was as if from a pew on Sunday morning. She held him now without even a breath of sound as she must hold those lucky boys when she sings them to sleep, as she surely did before they tended to boys' games. She was at least seven inches taller than he, with black hair up in a bun, a plain blue sweater, and white slacks, as opposed to his brown corduroy, brown tie. Age worked gradually on her face, and with any loss of youth she became all the more full of understanding, of living joy, and therefore of beauty. Though she'd been singing there over seven years, and though she'd practiced countless solos with him, and though she was very kindly and affectionate, she'd never touched him; but he knew she had a nice way of touching — she'd smile in such a way he could feel it. But he tried not to think of that.

Before she could see him, he turned toward the stairs that ascended privately behind the sanctuary and at the top unlocked a door hidden in the wall — the old place was full of them — and peeked around in near darkness at the towering crystalline columns. To his knowledge no one else had seen the pipes in years, and they were beautiful, in such a way that he never really approached them, tapped them. He'd just stand and gaze and try to understand the beasts; for some reason, all these years they cooperated — breathed and exhaled — grew with the cold and shrank with the heat — sat pensive and raged to heaven — and never asked anything of him. They would distance the street and the cars and congregation. They were his smile, his handshake — they were what people knew of Reginald Lunt.

Through the gray dusty clefts between the pipes he could discern shreds of the pulpit and to the right the organ console, facing the pulpit, and to its right the rising seating for the choir, and his watery eyes followed her rising up them and turning and waiting. He stood and held his hands before him and prayed for her to sing to him, so he could see her — so he could vibrate with these steel towers — so he could watch the holy faces in glass along the sanctuary walls for shards of pleasure which they must show, if only to him. Suddenly a feeling deafened him to the fantasy, the feeling he'd had many times before, of being a ghost in this cathedral, a mutant in the white robe he'd always worn before the people, someone tempted to sneak down to the basement and scare those boys into leaving the mother there to sing and sing and never wash or scrape or rake. He could wear his white robe and bring her tea and food...and drape it over his head and run screaming down there to the pool table...flying, old as he was, wiggled like a woman...he could play for her. But something in the building scared him too, and the way the brown-haired boy always smiled and forgot that "Mr. Lunt doesn't shake hands," and always stuck his thin hand out anyway, or maybe he never forgot. And they were *her* sons.

He remembered arriving many years ago for a lesser voice after the church had been broken into and they'd hired a brutish hulking dark man to guard the church, and he'd entered the sanctuary from the rear and he'd heard a low hot rattle and wet hot breath on his right hand, his soft right melody hand — he'd noticed a long spiny crack in the lofty ceiling that curved along the center of the church — he'd stared into it beyond the plaster-chipping flesh-ripping music-stopping teeth unsheathed — he'd only half-heard Dennis the guard say, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Lunt. Oh don't worry about her. She only attacks on command. Ha! And you don't gotta worry about that 'cause I for one have enjoyed your music these last few nights. You know I can hear it all over this huge place? Kind of creepy. Well, good evening." Only after the man and beast stalked casually out of the sanctuary did his head drop in a cordial nod, and, as he walked toward the organ, he found it extremely difficult to resist rubbing the hand. He was afraid to and afraid not to.

No, he would walk down there and do it. He would give her the song he'd been preparing for years. The song he'd always wanted to do — the one for which he'd finally found a voice — Anitra would sing Hassler's "Passion Chorale," almost 400 years after it'd been written, with Reginald Lunt's new accompaniment. Bach and others had tried a harmony. But nothing had captured what Lunt had. His chest had filled with the song whenever he'd thought of it, kept in a wide old dictionary on the page with "passion" and he had waited, waited six years for tonight.

Shuffling to the choir loft he almost could see the expressions of awe in the congregation. Awe, dismay, shock, joy, themselves like children. He pulled some stops and tapped a few pedals, trying to calm his slightly shaking hands.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes. Do you want to do this Sunday?"

"Yes. Would that be too soon?"

"No. I don't think so. I know the piece."

"I'll play an introduction then I'll play the first measure once then you begin."

It started with a light *moderato* melody in the right hand, easily recognized. He could hear Bernard of Clairvaux's 850-year-old lyrics, in English.

O sa- cred Head, now wound- ed
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scorn- ful- ly sur- round- ed
With thorns Thy on- ly crown,

and he could play it more subtly than anyone. Segueing into the first variation, he could feel the pain in the music he'd written, the torture of the words and the vision of the suffering, more vivid than ever before. By now the left hand on the lower keyboard joined a *celeste* line, rising to contrast as he started another variation, more joyous, though

still somber. She would be perfect. He gave her the measure, pauses (a silence more meaningful than any). Then she holds his spine and reaches right down into it and through his ribs and bones and nerves with a simple E-A-G-F, a simple "O sa-cred Head." She sings without any feathery elaborations, tartuffery. The voice is gentle and solid and pure as any throat could make it, and she sings his song. For the first time at the organ he lets himself smile; more remarkable still, he hears himself warbling along with her in his chest and throat. The first verse is the basic, only a slightly modified Bach; the second is the painful, and Anitra becomes Martha, John, Mary. Without trying, she must know it. She must. Everyone will hear. Now the last verse, the joyous. This will be the story.

O make me Thine for-ev-er!

And, should I faint-ing be,

The song leads itself. She and the organ are one.

Lord, let me nev-er, nev-er

Out-live my love to Thee!

Hold-2-3-4. Rest-2-3-4. Ah-2-3-4, Men-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Echostop.

Perfect notes. Perfect voice. The narrow crack hangs curvedly down the center aisle and may or may not have been widened by the song. Reginald can't tell. After a second he rises, leaving the organ on, and walks down the aisle, not noticing the boys sitting in a pew; only leaving.

That was very pretty. She remembers Coleridge's waterfall and his contempt for that thought. But "sublime" just isn't a word she uses regularly. Pretty. In fact she's never had a perfect performance; she's sung for others, when she was small, for her father, the farming butcher who'd named her after a Grieg piano piece about a ballerina he'd heard in the war (he was overseas when she was born). Or she sang folk songs for Dave with that hippie trio in college. Or just for the happiness it brings her. Never for the heights of the performance itself. Strange that Reg would leave like that though. She collects her papers and calls the boys to get their coats. It's late and they're sluggish — that may mean grouchiness on the way home but at least she won't have to dress them for the snow and mess with wet things. They start down the aisle and she follows and is almost out when, "Anitra? Anitra? Up here. It is I, Reginald. Um. Please give this to the pastor when you see him. Thank you very much indeed. You sung...beautifully. Thank you." He slips a folded paper between the pipes and it opens on the way and spirals down into a pew. Anitra just looks up, and can't see anyone.

"Please, just take it for me."

She files it in her folder of music, thinking somehow she knows what it will say, after all these years and songs and practices and riding home with Dave and the children after a solo. Outside, sitting on the hood of the red Volvo, the boys almost whimper with the cold, and she looks at the note under the light above the side door.

The Song cannot be written, cannot be played, cannot be sung.
And even if it could, your drowsy deaf congregation would not get it.
And even if they did, my pipes would surely break so kindly try
elsewhere.

Sincerely, R. Lunt

She lets the boys in, and leaves the lot. In the mirror she sees Seth soon asleep. Philip sits up and watches the buildings and elms and sidewalks.

"Mom. There's Mr. Lunt." She has already seen him, tall in his white robe, bald without his toupee, standing on a street corner watching across a very empty street for the signal to change. "Why don't we ever drive him home?"

"I don't know."

CORNERVILLE, ADAIR, ORBITS TERTIARY

That Cornersville was at the exact geographical center of the state had been established for some time; there was even a small obelisk a couple of miles outside the city limits to attest to the fact. The spot received little attention from the majority of the town, although it was a favorite among high school students on prom night and other such supposedly romantic interludes. In fact, a good portion of the Cornersville citizenry probably didn't even know that the marker existed.

Even less known than this, however, was the recent discovery that Cornersville was also the center of the universe. Working for several years at the local college, a group of professors had conclusively proven that the geographic center of the known universe was located in the middle of the beer aisle of an old convenience store downtown. The store was nothing remarkable; it substantially predated all of the chain convenience shops with the huge, lit bays that looked more like spaceships than gas stations, and simply consisted of a small brick building, painted over in peeling yellow and lacking any sort of sign except the faded red announcement "Wells Food." It did not even claim to be a grocery.

Now, it was a small accident of geography that Wells Food was separated from the center of the state by a distance of some three and a half miles, creating the ironic condition that the center of the universe and the center of the state were not in the same location, even though they were in the same town. This was not a situation that particularly bothered anyone for several years, especially since most of the townsfolk had no more idea of the secret of Wells Food than they did of the obelisk a few miles away. The scientists at the college even voiced their approval of the displacement, asserting something vague about asymmetry.

Nevertheless, the whole matter was of import to local politics. The Chamber of Commerce had somehow gotten hold of the scientists' report, had decided that the spot would be a remarkable attraction, and had hence proposed to plow it and plant a huge concrete monument, gift shop, golf course, fast food restaurant, and a hotel. How all of this was to fit in the space occupied by one small food store was not yet decided, but possible relief waited under the wings of the zoning commission, which was prepared to summarily rezone all of the houses in the neighboring historical district.

One chamberman had suggested that the two centers be moved to coincide with one another. This proposal brought prompt letters of condemnation from all eight neighboring states whose borders would be affected (except for one, which stood to gain a small border town). It was nevertheless bandied around and was even beginning to gain some approval until some astute commercial pointed out that if there were two separate monuments, then there could be two separate gift shops, golf courses, fast food restaurants and hotels, — and the added bonus of a gas station between the sites. Someone even pointed out that the road on which this gas station would lie could be named after their representative in the State House and therefore guarantee State money for its construction. Following such a meritorious proposal as this, the original chamberman and his original proposal were cleanly expurgated, and have both disappeared altogether except for an occasional round of golf, always in the rain.

It was decided, then, to clear the downtown historical district and Wells Food, and to replace them with the aforementioned tourist complex. Demolition of the store was no great difficulty; Mr. Wells himself had twice burned the place to collect insurance money, and when the city proposed to relocate him in a new building without the expense of a match, he had no complaints. The historic district was a bit trickier; the residents tried to have the demolition blocked in court, and the project was saved from considerable delay only because it was a city judge who was to hear the complaint, and

because he waited so long to do so that the houses had already been leveled. In any event, construction work was completed nearly four years ago, and the town of Cornersville now has two fine monuments demonstrating the importance of its location.

At this point, gentle reader, you are probably wondering why I have been bothering to tell to you a story as generally unremarkable as this. The fact of the matter is I am presently the legal representative of the City of Adair which, it seems, has been declared the center of the universe by a different group of scientists working at a different (and, the city claims, more prestigious) university. Adair has filed suit to require that Cornersville remove its monument, making the quite logical argument that there can only be one center of the universe, and that therefore Cornersville's claim to the title amounts to nothing more than corporate misrepresentation and the swindling of tourist dollars.

Neither city seems interested in settling out of court, and as far as I can tell, the matter will be difficult. In what will no doubt be key testimony, both sets of scientists claim to both be correct, their prepared statements being nearly identical. It seems that, according to all parties concerned (and I have had my paralegals verify this) current scientific opinion holds that every point in the universe is at its three dimensional center owing to some anomaly of space time; the assertion being that the universe is four dimensional. They explain it by using the example of a two-dimensional person on the surface of a sphere: without knowing his situation, and only being able to perceive in terms of length and width (but not height), the world would appear infinite and bounded - you could go as far as you wanted in any direction, although you would eventually end up at the same place as you started. Since this would be true no matter where you were, you could reasonably claim that any point was the center of your world.

I claim no understanding of the scientists, but also believe that the facts of the matter are irrelevant and that the outcome of the suit will depend on which judge hears it. Judge Ridley is known for jailing college students on traffic violations, hates intellectuals, and distrusts anyone who requires glasses thicker than his. Judge Frazier wears thick glasses, sides with the gown, and distrusts anyone who has not yet discovered that mechanical pencils are more serviceable than manual. If Ridley gets the case, the scientists with the thicker glasses lose; if Frazier, the location of the center of the universe revolves around who owns the most serviceable pencils.

Postscript: The trial was settled last year by Judge Clayton after nearly six months of legalities; for all practical purposes, both cities lost. It was decided that anyone who wanted could legitimately place a monument to the center of the universe anywhere he wanted. However, the profitability of the idea was gone within a week, when a local T-Shirt company printed shirts announcing in huge red letters, "Kiss Me - I'm at the Center of the Universe." The apparel became a national fad, and no one thereafter believed that a trip to either Cornersville or Adair was worth the effort when one to the local mall would suffice.

I did pass by the monument earlier today, or perhaps more correctly the monument site, the city having since leveled the area and mentioned vague plans for the construction of some sort of parking facilities. Walking onto the now slightly overgrown lot, I found a bit of an oddity in a clump of brush at the edge: a brick, colored on one side with faded yellow paint, the only reminder of Mr. Wells and his store. It was covered with a black dirt so fine as to be nearly dust, not unlike that which, through the entire series of events, has been slowly circling a planet four times as massive as earth; slowly circling in a thin, dark ring, the methane cloud tops of Neptune.

*Photography
and
Art*

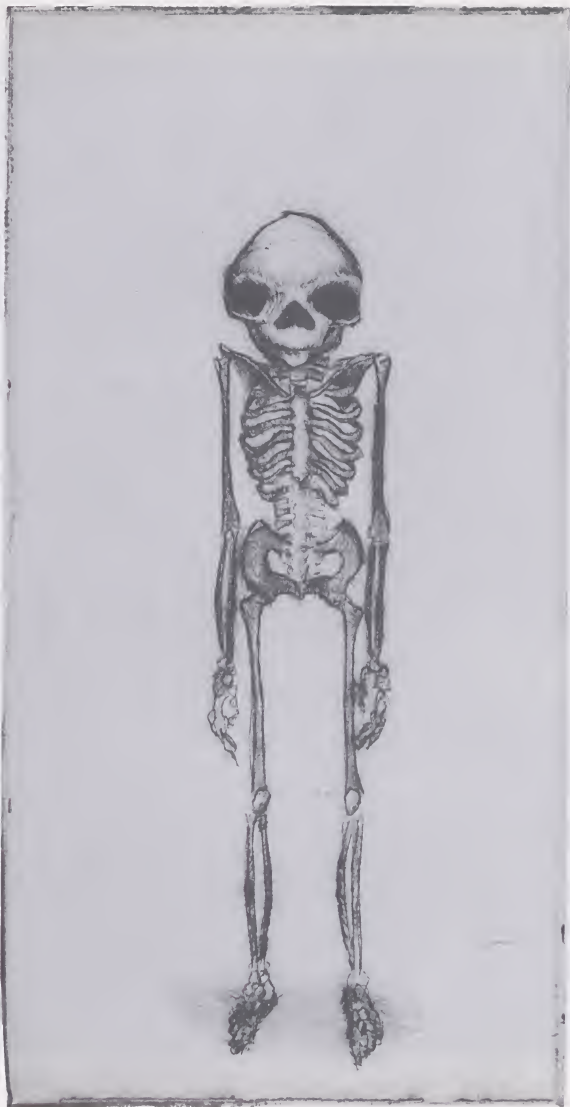


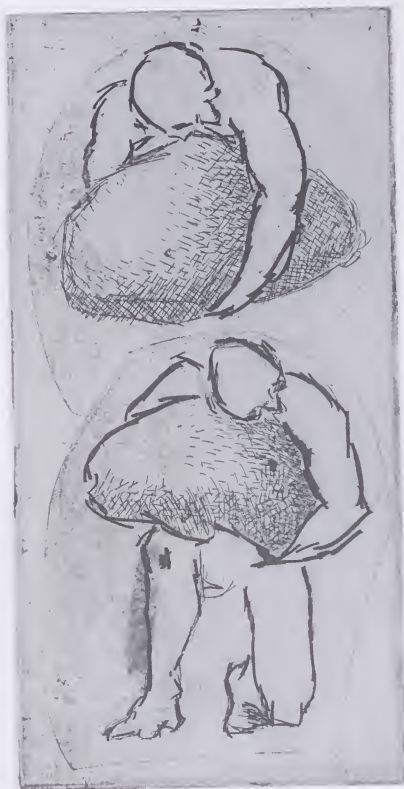


Randy Hall













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FALL 1991





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Dedicated to Robert Hedin,

Poet-in-Residence, Wake Forest University, 1979-1992



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VISIONS OF GRANDEUR

By Stephen G. Dillingham

Know thyself.

- The Oracle at Delphi

I've often been told that you only should do what you know how to do well.

- They Might Be Giants

If you have played basketball all your life and want to go to the Olympics, you wouldn't try out for the swim team. That would be ridiculous. But this is exactly the sort of thing Wake Forest has been trying to do for the last several years. In its attempt to achieve national recognition for Wake Forest, the administration has lost site of the real strength of the university — its ability to provide a strong undergraduate liberal arts education. Instead, President Hearn and other administrators have decided that Wake Forest's manifest destiny lies in its graduate and professional programs (as well as in corporate sponsors and a country club environment; but I digress).

I have no complaints about any of the professional schools *per se*. They have been an integral part of the Wake Forest tradition and do not interfere with undergraduate education. In fact, there are many cases where the undergraduate curriculum has been enriched by the professional schools. Graduate academic programs (aside from those at Bowman Gray) are a different story. By their very nature they reduce the emphasis on undergraduates, thereby undermining the foundation upon which the university was built.

I don't mean to imply that any of our graduate programs are bad, or that graduate students don't deserve the degrees they are given by Wake Forest. But we simply don't have the resources become a leading research university.

To begin with, we do not offer enough graduate level classes to compete with larger research universities. Most graduate students spend at least a year taking undergraduate level courses. I know of several Wake Forest graduates who have

chosen to attend graduate school here and who have run out of classes to take in their department. They have had to take either independent studies or classes in other departments in order to have enough credits for their degrees.

The lack of graduate level courses hurts undergraduate as well as graduate students. In large departments such as English, this means that undergraduates often have a difficult time enrolling in high-demand classes. In addition, when professors have to design independent studies for graduate students (or work with them on their theses), they simply cannot devote as much time to undergraduates.

Consequently, courses suffer in a variety of ways. Class sizes tend to increase, since fewer courses can be offered when professors are busy teaching or working with graduate students. Similarly, the quality of work required tends to decrease. If teachers do not have time to grade a lot of papers, either fewer will be assigned or they will be graded less thoroughly. (To my knowledge, though, the latter has never been true at Wake Forest. I hope it never will be.)

There are two ways to remedy the situation. First, we could increase the number of faculty members we have in proportion to the number of graduate students we take. We could even attempt to buy our way to the top by hiring well known scholars in a variety of fields. But that raises the ugly question (among others) of how to pay for such a venture. And I don't think even the wizards who run the capital campaign could come up with a satisfactory answer to that question.

If we tried to raise the money through contributions, we would be forced to explain why. "We want to have bigger graduate programs, so we have to hire more faculty member. The undergrads? Well, we've got to have our priorities, and we decided to increase graduate programs." I don't think lines such as these would be very good selling points. (I'm assuming that Wake Forest would be hon-

est about what the money would be for — after all, honor is part of our heritage.) The other way to get the money would be to raise tuition still more.

Raising tuition seems promising. Of course, to be efficient, we would have to slash financial aid packages. But that would be okay. If a student's parents could afford to pay outrageously high tuition, it is likely that they would freely give additional money to Wake Forest. After all, we're a nonprofit organization. And since Wake Forest would be a national university, we wouldn't have a problem getting students. With all the ivy we've just planted, I'm sure people would believe that we're just like the Ivy League. Pretty soon we could probably convince most Duke students to transfer to Wake Forest and as a bonus get the national recognition that comes with having obnoxious basketball fans.

The other, less glorious alternative is to substantially reduce our current graduate programs. At the very least (read: here's a suggestion which the administration might not dismiss immediately), we should not expand them and should offer only Masters degrees. (Again, degrees offered at Bowman Gray are an exception.)

I realize that this suggestion will be met with a great deal of resistance from both administrators and faculty members. And some faculty members will agree with me except when it comes to their department. (The "yes, but our program is different" mentality.)

I also realize that there are some real problems which would be caused by cutting graduate programs, especially in the sciences where graduates students are an integral part of ongoing research. But these problems should be secondary to the problem of providing the best possible education for undergraduates.

And I realize that my ideas about Wake Forest may sound like just so much idealistic rhetoric. However, I have a practical goal in mind (read: administrators shouldn't put this article down yet) — to become known as one of the best liberal arts schools in the country as opposed to attempting to become a national university/research institution. (Note to pragmatists: The fact that this goal suits the tradition of the school better than attempt-

ing to become a nation university does mean that it will be quicker and easier to achieve.)

Cutting back graduate programs is one of two major changes necessary to become a leading "national liberal arts college." The other is to de-emphasize the undergraduate business and accounting programs. Ideally, (read: administrators can ignore the rest of this sentence) majors in business and accounting should be eliminated and replaced by minor a minor which would supplement an academic major.

Practically, though, a business minor could be created in addition to the business and accounting majors. The minor could offer essential business and/or accounting courses while not requiring those which teach things readily learned on the job. It could also emphasize practical experience and encourage summer internships. This would encourage students to pursue their academic as well as their pragmatic interests. And it would only be fair. All the departments in the College of Arts and Sciences except economics offer minors, so why should the School of Business and Accountancy not do the same?

To be good at everything is a pleasant daydream, but to think that it is possible is simple-minded stupidity. And this is no less true for the Ivy League schools than it is for Wake Forest. Harvard, Princeton, and Berkeley may have top ten graduate programs in every field, but undergraduates at those schools do not receive as sound an education as Wake Forest students do. And that's the way it ought to be.

The world does not need another Harvard or Princeton or Berkeley. But it does need schools which are devoted to excellence in educating undergraduates. Wake Forest is among such schools, and there it should remain, attaining recognition based upon its merits as such.

To President Hearn, the trustees, and other administrators, I offer the following advice (I'm sure Dr. Hearn, at least, will be reminded of an equally applicable, though overused, quotation from Robert Frost.):

*Yes there are two paths you can go by,
but in the long run there's still time to change
the road you're on.*

- Led Zeppelin

Poetry

**SHE CLUNG TO HER SOUTHERN DRAWL,
ONLY TO DIE FORTY YEARS LATER
IN BALTIMORE**

The day they tied her dignity off
in a colostomy,
eyes ice blue
and full,
she was just bones enough
for the cancer
to pick its teeth.

The acrid woman
in the hospital room
was not my grandmother.
Wig slipping,
arms brittle as cracked twigs,
she was angry, restless
for the cool dark
of Richmond soil.

SEANCE

The shamen of my memory scream like a clan
Of banshees in the desert-dark night, conjuring
Lives that once were mine. My dead souls
Dance in front of me, animating the past
With a parade.

Inviting me into their sanctuaries, with hollow faces
They slither and writhe through the silk of
Eclipsed time. In the shadows they sing canticles,
Resonating like the distant tones of wood chimes.
And each ghost gropes for me and tries to
Lay me onto a couch of time.

But I refuse their flattery and deny their
Attempts to persuade me to linger in the
Theaters of their lives.

There will be no resurrections in the realm of this vision.

Away from the holocaust of their charms,
I reach out to the gate of arms that
Harbors my presence.

And I have chosen the coffin in which I will die.

SAPPHIRE VALLEY WITH C. PARKER

The night sky splashes overhead.
I listen for wind;
soft waves crashing on branches.
The stream downhill trickles over rocks
and harmonizes with strains of jazz.
Like a moth my breath
rises and
staggers toward the moon.

THE HISTORY OF MAN

They got it all wrong
when they said
monkeys.
They should've thought slower
and fatter
with tusks jutting through drool.
Should've thought wiry hair,
skin thick as peat.
Underneath, four stumps on calloused trotters,
a twist of cord behind.
They should've thought
more razorback, more blackened swine.

And long ago in darkness
they practiced standing,
mounting each other
back to belly in that first muck.

HANGING ROCK

Leaves click like dry husks
of cocoons.
I read the Tao Te Ching and Neruda
while the sun descends.
All winter they cling,
bats
frozen to the black cave of sky.

OPPOSITION OF BLADES

Poetry is product of creative hate.

I think of you when mowing the grass
or engaging in some other constructive destruction
(somehow judged productive, useful, necessary)
like writing down words
to relieve memory of burden
and distance the self from its downfall
Emotion.

I think of you as I destroy myself
and my extensions; simple actions,
cutting down grass,
the recording of events,
cathartic fantasizing.
As I am dismembered,
I return stronger.
Thoughts of you fortify my rebirth.

Return with me
To the redoubled nightfall
 of our flickerings
Like sands scattered and absent,
To the memory-like storybook
From which I read
And to which you said
Oooo...
Youth is quick moments
Like the moon daily narrowing
Like a kiss soon retracting.

VISION

Yesterday the language of shirts, today the vision
In red repair: here the white neck,
Bright when I touch, and your Scots hair
Forested above. Shyly turn, and the horizon
Of your eyes hides, like a fox.
I know that I have known you
In the crowning of a beer, or, more rarely,
At the Crux of a dream of cut marble.
Waking, I would never imagine it so,
Not here, with earth immeasurably near,
And the birds of a dreamscape rising
Skyward, the language of fear.

ALEXANDER ISLAND

Summer over, the sun falls forever.
The black terns circle without orient
In the snow,
And in the earth
The bones stir and bless the cold.

SONNET FOR XX

When I think of you now I feel nothing
but stupid. I piss away good afternoons
idealizing your voice, your breasts,
your brain power. I let myself fall
to depression so I can write bad
lines on your humble behalf. The Romantics
might call these things moving.
They might praise me for a vision
that denies your ugly existence
in favor of passionate flashes
and good this and good that.
But those guys are all dead
of diseases we have shots to prevent.
Everyone living hated you and me together,
and that is insight I respect as wholly
as I live by Darwinian evolution.

I'LL NEED TO DO THIS WHEN I'M OLDER, TOO

Maybe I'll tell my wife
and son, "I'll be back after dark."
Then I'll buy a single beer
like truckers do, and drive country roads
till I find a place like that hill
at the end of Old Jack's Creek Pike.
There, on the hood of my car
I'll make a cigarette last
the hours of an afternoon
so I can think about old girlfriends
and smoking with them
before I knew how to inhale.
We sat there puffing like hell, and below
the brown Kentucky River shrugged
through a valley of sagging barns,
churning slowly, silent as the rotting leaves.

SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE

The eyes roll back to find the soul, in vain.
A heap of charcoaled cinders, ashes wet
With darkness leave a chalky, sullen stain
On every pinkish, corporeal wall. And yet,
Although the core be dead, although the brain
A mechanistic, whizzing, whirring net
Of neurons be, outside the chapel plain
And unadorned, the sunset silhouette
Of pines against the blazing, bloody wane
Of dying day ignites a solace met
With joy within my corpse. My thoughts remain
Befuddled, though a child these sights beget.
The wind is cold. My ashen baby sleeps
And dreams of God; its stillborn father weeps.

ILA

On New Years Day
the sun is high,
looking for a room.
Scattered pine needles
breathe orange
on the walk.

In the machine shop,
a transmission
gutted
into rows and rows
of frozen gears
toothed like the mouths
of old farmers.

There are no hotels in Ila.

CLOSET NIHILIST

Through Goodwill shirts
and jackets,
the door will not even close.

Through piles of letters
saved from when
we would sit up over a dozen
bad beers
and watch the rain
collect in your gutter
like a population.

Through towels and hammers
and laundry and modems,
and hanging against the wall
like a painting,
a paisley tie,
neatly pressed.

SCHOFIELD HYDROELECTRIC

Touched only by dust
from daily L & N hoppers,
for years the red brick walls
have held constant,
patchwork shingles covering a roof
in entropy.

It is nearly midnight.
No one is here,
not Boyle and Joxer,
or Albert, who from eight to five every day
does not budge
from his spot on the balcony.
Not Reilly whose still-unfinished cross
decorates the entrance to the restroom,
and not Goodson
who will die tomorrow,
but only if he oversleeps and races the train
at the grade crossing.

Somewhere inside
electrons
and wooden turbines spin like looms.

Fiction

PROVERBS ON HEALING

"In the spring leaves grow," thought Miles Calico as he struggled through today's maze, sweeping the beach. He had been sweeping the beach for quite some time. He was sure that there was a beautiful oak ballroom dance floor fit for a good waltz or a timely two-step beneath all the sand, sea shells, and general debris commonly associated with a California seaside. "I definitely slept through my fifteen minutes of fame," Miles convinced himself as he leaned against his industrial strength broom for support, swaying gently in his thought as though he were dancing with the sea. He was tired and needed a rest from his labors — sweeping a beach was no easy task and many of his friends (mostly those who were merely intrigued by his sense of humor) chided him for such an undertaking. Why not sweep the streets? or sweep office buildings? or sweep Congress? But Miles alone knew there was a difference. "It is true," thought Miles aloud, "that only women can write erotica with any validity. For men the sexual experience was just this... thing — an amazing thing at that but somehow different from the experience of women. For women it was much... deeper — no pun intended. Their feelings seem so much more complex than a man's but no more important. And how can you write about something you cannot even feel?" Miles could feel the tension of anxiety in his chest pull and construct his muscles. Miles had decided while sweeping — one can decide many things while sweeping — that he disliked what he perceived as the innate cynicism or the negativism of his friends and cohorts in adventure and eating. So he took a vow of "anti-negativism." His friends pointed out that the name "pro-positivism" might be more apt, but Miles didn't understand their point. "Negative vibrations keep people down," thought Miles as he tried to sweep out the small and warm tidal pool that was trying to develop in the area he had just finished sweeping, and he tried not to sound too much like a hippie in his musings, because the one thing Miles could not stand were hippies.

Speaking of hippies... a long-haired acquaintance of Miles came stumbling by, apparently well damaged by his present drug of choice. He was mumbling some bits of poetry that Miles, in his unique idiom, could only attribute to Virgil. "Till lust conceives, naught is possible: (belch) Indiscretions breed interest and spasms (stagger to the left). Strip the soul of all (dramatic arm waving) preeee-tensions: Articulate tongues engender orgasms, (Swoon and from a prone position:) Inundating comprehension."

"Hello Gus," said Miles. He had met Gus Krutsch at a picnic thrown by some little firemen who also played in a rock-n-roll combo dubbed "Dumbwaiter."

"Hullo Smiles!" grinned Gus while gazing up at Miles' six foot frame and found him grimacing at the perversion of his name.

"What a pathetic wreck," thought Miles as he watched this out-dated cruncher wallow in the sand trying to stand and breathe and check the time of day simultaneously. Gus had taken to the habit of writing letters to the editor lately. "At least I haven't sunk to that level," Miles consoled himself. "Hello Gus," he said aloud and again. "I've got something that just might top even you." Miles extracted a piece of brown grocery store bag paper and began to recite to his audience of several minnows that had recently arrived in his tidal pool (perhaps they somehow knew there would be a poetry reading and had gotten the word out) and his inebriated herbivore friend: "PROVERBS ON HEALING, by Miles Calico, 1991. 'Dear M., We all do what we want to do. I won't let anyone make me feel like I'm only doing what they want me to do — they don't have that power over me anymore. I can't force anyone to like what I like. I need to exude a stronger force so that I'm not being completely molded like some small clay figurine — give and take. What I like and find funny and pleasurable is just as valid as what everybody else feels. That's the cold truth. Information is at our fingertips, and I can't lower myself to any level and feel content, and it is not fair to force someone to rise out of their comfort

zone — a cozy, warm, safe place not unlike a large bed in the winter time during one's youthful days. I'd like to be your Robin Hood or Snow White or any of those saddened dreams of a deluded adulthood if you'd let me. But only bring it down a bit. Everyone wants to be taken care of, picked up and held. But that puts a lot of pressure on Mr. Hood and Ms. White. It's simply enough to say, "Welcome here. I'm glad you are here and would like to show you about." That's enough. I can't expect any more. I know what you're holding out for, and I don't think you should let go. But I also know that you're wrong. You should hold out but not for your reason. Robin Hood may never come to supper. Shrouded view from inside, crystal clear from the outside — that's what you are, like a magazine. I don't pity you. I don't disrespect you. I just wish I could talk to you on some common level. You don't throw yourself about — I like that. But you never venture out on your own — no more than I do I guess. You stay safe and in that way I'll never be able to reach you. My hair grows longer as I grow older day by day. But your spine stays curved at exactly nine degrees. I'm not deteriorating; I'm building like a house of cards. It's a very delicate game intended only for the sure and steady handed. But everyone should play if they get the chance. When you're tired, completely exhausted, strange and very honest things pop into your mind. I'm to that point now, and I'm beginning to talk about proverbs on healing. What I want to know is if you'd be willing to share the light and the heavy and to change only enough to meet me half way because certain things don't work for me anymore. I want to suck the juice out of life but not gorge myself and choke on the seeds only to hack them into the soil so that they may grow to torment somebody else. I'm talking about children. It's not a question of healing back to the original state because something was wrong with the original formula. It is time to change the equation all together and lengthen its parameters. Science has nothing to do with love and my soul. You'll never find that stray electron that is my soul or anybody's for that matter. It'll always hide behind some dense and nebulous cloud. No caliper will ever find it. In my mind I can do anything, except not be alone. So for me the choice is easy. Love, W.' Well? What do you think?" Snore rose up from the derelict flower child. Miles kicked him in the head and went off to get some coffee, thinking about art and Thomas Mann and his writing about writing and how it all seems so far away from love. Miles was hungry, so very hungry and hungry all the time — like the emptiness was produced not from the lack of food, because he ate well, but from somewhere else, some place foggy and in the back of his mind. He couldn't nail it down and it frustrated him because it made him harp on it constantly and tremble and make a lot of unnecessary and foolish phone calls to people he ought not to be speaking with in the first place. San Francisco was much to Miles' liking. One day the air would be warm, the next day quite cold. Miles despised predictability as much as hippies and bad coffee, though deep inside he knew this was a lie — that bad coffee wasn't that detestable. When one is totally predictable, he is see-through. His guts actually glow in a weird translucent light. To Miles these people don't even exist. They are like extras or cardboard cut-outs to flesh out his movie-like and deluded existence. The coffee at the diner was quite good as Miles looked out across the Bay. Men were fishing and birds were doing what birds usually do. Miles wondered if birds, like all cats, had a secret or alternate life. Cats often find a home besides their own that they may visit and get added attention and, most importantly, more food. Cats have it mad, except for street cats or bum cats especially here in San Francisco. In London there were thousands of cats in the North, but they all seemed to have homes and were well fed. The only thing big in England are the dogs.

Miles paid for his coffee with a smile and strolled out on the sidewalk. Every morning Miles woke up and thought about the potential of this new day — the potential for something amazing and life-altering to happen, like a wedding. This is why Miles hated holidays. The potential for anything earth shattering to happen in one's life was

at an absolute minimum — a nadir point. Even the video stores are closed. AS he strolled down the sidewalk back to his broom, he thought about all his old friends scattered across the country and the world. How nice it would be if they were all in the same room together right now. Maybe they all were together at this moment. How was Miles supposed to know away here in San Francisco? Maybe his invitation got lost in the mail. But then again he probably wouldn't have anything appropriate to wear. His mind drifted back to London. He never saw the trolley car that smashed him flatter than a pancake.

Do not cry over the loss of Mr. Miles Calico. For he was but a figment of the imagination — an extension of myself. He was a branch that needed pruning. It is very natural and part of a time-honored process that goes on every day, every single day. So do not shed more than a tear or two for our mutual loss. I won't because you never know, there might be one more story in the old boy yet! And remember anyone who has the urge to pick up a guitar or paint brush or a computer keyboard is in some way an egomaniac.

THE RAT, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT

"Genuinely proud," the sign had said, "to have the Fair here, once again..." We walked among the cold October darkness, astounded by the blinking lights and noisy machines, simply wandering in an old parking lot. As I gathered myself together, staggering from the "Moon Shot," stumbling along with our group I heard the cry, "Deus ex Machina," or "Deus ex... (something)..." Everyone had disappeared into the darkness; mostly we were alone. Alone with the fair workers and the machines.

"What, do people really pay to do this?"

"Where are the pig races? Not tonight."

And we lingered among the many flashing booths; I stood at a distance.

"Age? Weight? It's not too late... to WIN," he sounded. We moved on, then lingered once more.

"Hey, Red, win your girl a prize!"

Lost in the bewitching harmonies that rung from the strung speakers, from one to the next we moved on through the evening. Three booths down from the headless lady was the queerest sight that I had ever seen. As we approached it, I saw it. I heard it; no music, no real interest, the large sign read, "The World's Largest Rat." The tone of voice was excited, "SEE, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT, SO BIG, BIGGER THAN A SMALL CHILD." The sign and the words were enough, as if the volume and size overwhelmed the senses. The sign hung like a monster above a hidden cage; inside lay the creature.

"A rat in there?"

Some distance from the cage was a feeble looking fence, a small ticket booth, and a hunched-over man.

"Oh God, a rat."

I had noticed the man sitting strangely bent over the booth. He sat there carelessly, reading, his head almost lost in his lap. This brave soul the keeper of the RAT... but the sign, well the sign was tremendous. A terrific rat portrayed as contorted, cowering with gnashing teeth; it stared at us all. The loud speakers rang out, "SEE, THE RAT, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... FOR THE FIRST TIME AT YOUR FAIR, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... SO BIG..." The cold night air drove us on, and I looked back over my shoulder. The voice faded with the cage, the man — all into flashing darkness, all growing behind us.

The spectacle of the Fair was something to see. Walking on a circular path, some usually-deserted parking lot, we moved from detail to particular detail. Laughing inside, we were the beguiled, the spoken for, and we should have known better. We continued on, holding tight to the few dollars and tickets we had left.

After some time, after the chilling air had ripened our minds, we had moved around the perimeter. And I saw the sign again and soon heard the voice. Some strange fate; we were to confront the RAT. "SEE, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT, SO LARGE, SO BIG, BIGGER THAN A SMALL CHILD."

As we approached the booth, he came alive, setting his book open-faced down before him. Then I saw him. His eye, his face fully lined, the edges hidden by a cap that came down around his stubbled features and tied underneath. His nose disheveled, as if broken in some terrible fight, was held firm by a line of tape. It stretched over a crooked bridge. His eyes were two different beings that just happened to live next to each other. The right was inset, working diligently over the tickets and sights, the left was cast off, a solid milky white; it rolled blindly in its socket.

"Oh my God," came a soft cry from behind as they glimpsed the visage. He never looked up with his good eye. He just took a ticket and placed it into a hole, a hole that stared back at him in awe. Always looking down, he was handed a ticket and placed it in its place. But the white eye rolled freely, gazing over me and then the others.

"Oh, I can't do this..." and she shuffled off a safe distance away. Disoriented, fainthearted I stood next. The ticket passed from my hand and the eye gazed over me. It peered deeply; I could feel its gaze. The second turned over and over into minutes, too long. The untamed eye pierced my body, bounced off and glimpsed my soul. It knew me, completely and suddenly, and I was exposed. I hurried through the gate in shame with eyes wide.

I followed the group up to the small platform to peer into the cage. "SEE, THE RAT, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... FOR THE FIRST TIME AT YOUR FAIR, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... SO BIG..." The words grew with each step and finally I stood before the cage, the voice so loud; wincing in pain I peered into a stench. "SEE, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT, SO LARGE, SO BIG, BIGGER THAN A SMALL CHILD." The creature before me was cowering in the corner. His eyes were like mine, wide, shiny black reflecting pools. It stayed frozen with a distant nervous fear. It had no tail, lost in some terrible fight; it was a strange rodent. "SEE, THE RAT, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... FOR THE FIRST TIME AT YOUR FAIR, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT... SO BIG..." Glancing up, I was alone; the others were already past the booth, the gate and the man. Looking down again I saw a glimmer in the black eyes, a pitiful sight, hopeless continuous fear. I gathered my courage to leave. As I turned from the cage, I glanced up at the huge sign over head, and the rat pictured above. "SEE, THE WORLD'S LARGEST RAT, SO LARGE, SO BIG, BIGGER THAN A SMALL CHILD." The pictured rat stared anxiously, concerned, far over my head, gazing with fear at the man and his eye. I stepped back and away into a blackness and awoke with the others far, far away.

CINDER DAY, TRASH DAY, GARBAGE DAY

The Elmers had lived on Chancegrove for twelve years now. It was a nice sort of street, populated by people who do the sorts of things that nice people do: to work at seven o'clock every morning, home at four in the afternoon, pick up the paper, go inside, and pat the dog gently on the head. They washed their cars on Sundays and their dogs on Saturdays, and mowed the front yard on Saturdays and the back on Sundays. All in all, they had everything that anybody could want in neighbors, and the street had all the amenities that anybody could want in a street: nice curbs, proximity to school and fire hydrant, no ugly chain link fences, and of course, excellent sanitation services.

Trash day was Tuesday. On the evening before trash day, everyone placed at the curb all of their unneeded but still potentially serviceable goods: milk bottles, old air conditioners and the like. And, on Tuesday morning, the white truck would come and remove them, generally before the postman arrived and always before noon.

Garbage day was Thursday. On the evening before garbage day, everyone placed at the curb cans full of their family's waste: dinner scraps, coffee grounds, and the like. And, on Thursday afternoon, usually before rush hour and always after noon, the white truck would come, empty the cans of their contents into itself and carry the refuse away. It is probable that on neighboring Mulapple Street the white truck came on Tuesday afternoons and Thursday mornings, and has even been supposed that at one time, Mulapple and Chancegrove Streets had an opposite arrangement whereby Chancegrove got the morning truck on Thursday, but for the twelve years the Elmers had lived there, the schedule had been exactly the same.

Cinder day was Saturday, though it was not like garbage and trash days. Every cinder day, i.e. every Saturday but only between October and April, each household would empty its fireplace of ashes and place them in a steel bucket by the street, and that afternoon, a grey truck would come and empty the buckets into itself.

There were of course holidays, and it was therefore necessary at times to make special accommodations. For example, Thanksgiving always occurs on a Thursday, and as an official holiday, the sanitation department is always closed. Special arrangements were made several years ago: Garbage day was postponed until Friday, but occurred in the morning, since it would be of obvious benefit to discard one's Thanksgiving dinner as soon as possible. In this sort of manner, the residents of Chancegrove Street came to rely on a sanitation service that was at once efficient and considerate.

One day during an unusually hot spell in October, Mrs. Elmer became very ill. The matter was not life-threatening, but it was serious, and she had to be taken to the hospital that Monday afternoon. Mr. Elmer of course went with her, and as it became apparent that her release was not to be immediate, he resolved to spend the night. The tragic result of this was that no one remembered to take out the trash.

Mr. Elmer returned to his house late Tuesday afternoon; his wife, it had been asserted, was doing much better but needed her rest. Besides that, he had not been into work that day, and there was much to do at home to prepare for tomorrow. While sitting at his desk, he noticed that the room was uncomfortably hot, and so went to turn on the air conditioner, only to notice that it no longer seemed to reside in the living room window as it once had. He poked his head behind the curtain of the room's other window and after not finding it there returned to his work. He really thought nothing of the matter, figuring that his wife had probably moved the unit to a more efficient location, and in any event, he was too busy to worry about such trivial matters.

On Wednesday, Mrs. Elmer took a decided turn for the worse, and it was beginning to be feared that her stay in the hospital would be much longer than anyone had anticipated. Mr. Elmer became involved once again in her care, and spent the night once

again in her room. He went directly from there to work the next morning, not even bothering to find a clean shirt. His McDonalds breakfast did not set well, and so in addition to being worried by his wife's generally failing health, he was bothered by an upset stomach nearly all day. It was therefore no surprise that he threw up when he returned home to find that his driveway was missing. There was a considerable rubble where it had been, and he could only think of his favorite movie, *Star Wars*, and how the Death Star had entirely destroyed the planet of Alderaan, leaving only the gravel, which was exactly what was left of his driveway. He thought of Jabba the Hut and puked again.

Mr. Elmer took a hotel room that night. He had become increasingly convinced that the neighborhood was becoming plagued by vandals and was in no mood to confront them. Stopping by a grocery to buy some beer, he saw a tabloid and because instead convinced that an alien tractor beam had taken the asphalt from his driveway to effect the completion of an interplanetary highway from the moon to earth. By 7:00 he was quite drunk, and by 8:00 was in bed.

At five o'clock he abruptly awakened and returned to Chancegrove Street. There was a message on the answering machine indicating that Mrs. Elmer had a minor heart attack that night and had been transferred to intensive care, condition serious but stable. Feeling less than well, he took a shower, at the conclusion of which he with great ceremony got ready for work: freshly pressed pants and shirt, silk tie, wool coat, laboriously polished shoes and generally as neatly dressed as he had been throughout most of twelve years of office work. There was the newspaper, some sort of headline about wars in Africa, but he was unable to make sense of it through his headache. He downed the last of his beers to take off the hangover, swallowed several aspirin and went to work. On the way, he picked up some cigarettes, the first he had smoked in five years. It was the first of three packs that day.

By noon a call had come in that Mrs. Elmer had been downgraded to critical condition. He left work early to go to the hospital, was rebuffed by the receptionist with some sort of chatter about limited visiting hours and ended up at a local bar, where he had a half dozen screwdrivers and a long conversation with an empty headed yuppie girl who was convinced that Dianetics would save her life from whatever distress she imagined it to be in and that the Communist party in America represented a real menace to the President, who should have hired more secret service men than he did.

Returning to the hospital, he ate several candy bars from the lobby machine before settling down with a Coke and the morning's paper, which he still could not read. He fell asleep in the waiting room, and awakened to the same set of chairs and fluorescent lights to which he had slept. Nothing had changed; his watch indicated that he had slept for two and a half hours, but it had also stopped. There was no receptionist, and he returned to his car to find a parking ticket, which he stuffed in his coat pocket and went to a late night Waffle House, returning home at nearly one in the morning.

Not feeling well, he slept virtually all of the rest of the weekend, waking up only long enough to notice that all the food in the house had spoiled; he instead smoked several cigarettes and drank several beers and again went to sleep. It was still early, but he nevertheless managed to sleep straight through until Monday morning, when he was awakened by a phone call. His wife's condition was worsening again, and emergency surgery might be necessary. He was advised to come at once to the hospital, but never made it that far.

Outside was the usual Monday morning truck. In it, unusually, was his car, having been lifted somehow by a group of about eight green uniformed men from its parking spot by the curb. One of them, whose face he could not distinguish in the glare of the morning sun, addressed him:

"Good morning, Mr. Elmer. It's been a while since we've seen you up and on your regular routine."

*Photography
and
Art*

























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